



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

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Sabres-Oilers preview

By Nicolino Dibenedetto

Associated Press

January 28, 2015

The Buffalo Sabres and Edmonton Oilers are the two worst teams in the NHL, and the Sabres are certainly deserving of that distinction as they're mired in the longest losing streak in franchise history.

They'll try to prevent it from reaching 13 on Thursday night when they go for a fifth straight win in Edmonton.

Buffalo (14-31-3) finished last in the league in 2013-14, and it's in the same position this season while sitting two points back of the Oilers (12-27-9), who are in the Western Conference cellar.

The Sabres' spiral to the bottom of the NHL has turned historic. They've set a team record with 12 straight losses, and they've all come in regulation for the longest such skid since Pittsburgh went 13 games in 2003-04.

Buffalo is also 0-11-1 in its last 12 on the road, surrendering an average of 4.58 goals while scoring 1.75 per game.

That continued in Tuesday's 4-1 loss at Calgary, as Buffalo gave up three goals in the third period while being outshot 15-2 and 31-18 overall.

"It's frustrating. We played 40 minutes of good hockey and came out in the third and kind of just crumbled," right wing Chris Stewart said. "We did have our chances and we just have to bear down. When they got their chances they put them in. That was the difference."

Stewart has been a rare bright spot for the Sabres, collecting four points in the last three games while scoring in each of the past two. He had eight goals and two assists in his last six visits to Edmonton while playing with St. Louis.

Drew Stafford has eight goals and two assists in seven career games against the Oilers, scoring in a 3-2 home loss Nov. 7 and a 3-1 victory at Rexall Place on March 20 as the Sabres won for the fourth straight time there.

The Oilers have lost four of six, with the victories coming against teams from the East. Edmonton, 9-7-1 against the opposing conference, returned from the All-Star break with a 2-1 loss to Minnesota on Tuesday.

"It was one of those games that we could have seen ourselves winning, but we had too many turnovers," said center Boyd Gordon, who tied it in the second period. "It was one of those games that we kind of let slip away."

Edmonton may be without Taylor Hall for a second straight game after suffering a bone bruise in his leg during practice earlier this week. The left wing has two goals in his last three against Buffalo, and his 29 points tie him with Jordan Eberle and Ryan Nugent-Hopkins for the team lead.

Nugent-Hopkins doesn't have a point in three career meetings with the Sabres, while Eberle has one in four.

The Sabres will again turn to Jhonas Enroth after he allowed at least four goals for the fourth straight start Tuesday. Enroth has been the starter for seven of the losses during the skid while posting a 4.90 goals-against average.

Sabres, Oilers dismiss tank talk

By Mike Harrington

Buffalo News

January 28, 2015

EDMONTON, Alberta – Tankapalooza. Tanker's Paradise. The McEichel Bowl. The Tin Cup final.

Come up with whatever name you can. It might be more enticing than the actual product we'll see on the ice Thursday night in Rexall Place, the once-glorious Northlands Coliseum that was the site of classic 1980s hockey among the best ever produced by the NHL.

An otherwise mundane January game with no playoff impact between the Buffalo Sabres and Edmonton Oilers is suddenly full of all kinds of implications that will make it a talking point around the league.

The capsule look at what's at stake reads like this:

- It is game 49 for both teams on the 82-game schedule. Edmonton (12-27-9) is 29th in the NHL's overall standing with 33 points while the Sabres (14-31-3) have lost a franchise-record 12 straight games in regulation and are dead last with 31. A loss tonight would set a new club mark for longest winless streak, breaking the 0-8-4 stretch Buffalo endured in 1991.
- Last place, of course, gives that team an 20 percent chance at the No. 1 pick in the NHL's draft lottery in April. But more important, it guarantees a top-two pick come June. Lose the lottery, and ostensibly the chance to draft Erie Otters phenom Connor McDavid, and you're sure to get Boston University stud Jack Eichel. Finish 29th and your 100 percent chance at a McEichel pick drops to just 33.5 percent. If someone outside the bottom two wins the lottery, No. 29 falls out of McEichel range entirely to 28.
- Even if they win Thursday in regulation, the Sabres will still be 30th. The teams would be equal in points but Edmonton would hold 29th for now on the basis of a better goal differential, the fourth tiebreaker.
- The Sabres had a 10-point lead over Edmonton as recently as Dec. 29. But the Oilers have gone 5-5-2 in their last 12 games thanks in part to new coach Todd Nelson and the acquisition of former Buffalo center Derek Roy. Meanwhile, the Sabres have floundered at 0-12 to fall two points back. Buffalo is 0-10 in January with two games left and has never gone winless in a month of at least eight games in its history.

The backdrop to the game, of course, is the pervasive feeling among many segments of both fan bases that losing is actually winning. Especially in this contest because of the McEichel factor. The Sabres already have one loss to Edmonton, a 3-2 defeat Nov. 7 in First Niagara Center, and a second would prop another tiebreaker the Oilers' way.

As you would imagine, neither team was thrilled to hear about the sidelight to Thursday's game after practice here Wednesday.

"That's no factor in our room. No one is looking at the draft," said Sabres defenseman Tyler Myers. "We're focusing on game by game and trying to win every game we can. And you know what? The bottom line is that if we were playing better before, we wouldn't be in this position in the first place. We're not playing for last here."

Oilers goaltender Ben Scrivens, whose brutal start to the season contributed to just one win in a 21-game stretch and the firing of coach Dallas Eakins, was furious at the thought. Scrivens apologized to reporters asking the questions and then let the tanking segments of fans and media in both cities have a piece of his mind.

"If anybody even insinuated to me ... that I was trying not to win or was going, 'Hey, you should take tonight off,' we'd have a fight," Scrivens said. "That's the most unbelievable thing you can say to a professional is 'try not to win this game.' It's mind-blowing that people even think that we're not trying to win."

Scrivens was talking calmly but the bite of his words was growing and he was really getting warmed up.

"Maybe I'll label some people but it's people who've never played competitively," Scrivens said. "It's people who don't know what the hell they're talking about, people who have never played a competitive game in their life and they're trying to say you should tank a game? It's head-shaking. Really."

Sabres coach Ted Nolan also acknowledged the chatter, clearly fueled in Buffalo by the open wooing of McDavid from General Manager Tim Murray and the franchise as a whole.

"If I'm trying to lose, then something's wrong," said Nolan. "There's nights you want to try to get better. Rebuilds aren't easy. Look at here in Edmonton. ... It's a tough league to win in. It's tough enough to win, let alone trying to lose."

The Sabres are now dealing with a new problem: No one wants to be the team to allow them to break their skid, the longest in the league since Pittsburgh dropped 13 straight in 2003.

"We mentioned that to the team a couple times in the last few games," Nolan said about opponents. "They sense a team coming in that's a little wounded, a little hurt so it's, 'Let's jump on them early and continue to hurt them.'"

The Sabres have been outscored, 53-17, during their 12-game slide to never-never land. It's 21-8 over the last four games and was 3-0 in Tuesday's 4-1 loss at Calgary as Buffalo disintegrated in the third period.

The Flames had three goals in the final 20 minutes while the Sabres had three shot attempts. Seriously. The shots on goal were 15-2 for Calgary and attempts were an astounding 28-3.

"It looked like we were a little tentative and worried to make a mistake," said winger Tyler Ennis, an Edmonton native playing at home Thursday. "When you're worried, that's when things happened. We talked after the game to just be confident. What's the worst that can happen?"

Zadorov back but won't play Thursday

By Mike Harrington

Buffalo News

January 28, 2015

EDMONTON, Alberta – Defenseman Nikita Zadorov is off the suspended list and was back on the practice ice Wednesday for the Buffalo Sabres. But he's not getting back in the lineup Thursday night.

Coach Ted Nolan has decided Zadorov is going to sit out the game against the Edmonton Oilers after he already missed Tuesday's 4-1 loss in Calgary. Zadorov was suspended for that one after returning late following the All-Star Game from a vacation in the Dominican Republic with his girlfriend.

Zadorov, who was reinstated Wednesday, explained the flight home was oversold and he was bumped. There were no other flights available and he could not return until Monday, thus missing Buffalo's first practice after the break and the flight to Calgary.

"I shouldn't do that," Zadorov said. "I should make the trip a day early and have a safe day, an extra day. It's kind of my mistake. I shouldn't do that. Next time I have to be safer."

Nolan said Zadorov will "more than likely" return to the lineup Friday night in Vancouver.

"Somebody does that, you don't just say 'sorry' and put him right back in," Nolan said. "I think it's the hierarchy of his situation. He just hopped on the ice one day for practice, off the ice eight days and I don't think it's fair to put anybody in that situation. At least we give him a couple days and put him back in."

"I feel sorry right now and embarrassed but it is what it is," Zadorov said. "It's happened. You have to move forward. I'm here and I'm ready to go and help my team do the best."

Nolan was impressed that Zadorov met with the team here and issued an apology to the players and coaching staff as a group.

"And it wasn't a standard 'I'm sorry,' " noted Nolan. "It was heartfelt."

"He's a good kid," said fellow blueliner Tyler Myers. "I made mistakes when I was that age and guys still make mistakes at times. He's going to be fine. He's been playing really well for us. When he gets that chance to step back in, you just try to help him as much as possible grow as a player on and off the ice as well."

First notice that Zadorov's suspension had been lifted came when General Manager Tim Murray appeared on his weekly interview Wednesday on WGR Radio. Murray said it would then be up to the coaching staff when the 19-year-old would return to the ice.

"I think it's just the right thing to do with the kid to teach him a lesson," Murray said. "I think it's the right thing to do with our veteran players to show them we're paying attention. The kid got caught in a situation where it really wasn't his fault, but don't get caught in those situations."

"We're trying to change the culture here. The kid did not do this purposely but there's still a lesson to be learned. I hope the rest of our prospects are paying attention. We want to be good to our prospects and our young players but there comes a time where right is right and wrong is wrong. I felt this was the right decision."

Zadorov said he was unaware of any thought about filing a union grievance to recoup the lost salary from the suspension. Murray made it clear the Sabres don't expect him to do that.

"There's great lessons to be learned by young guys that make them better," Murray said. "If they grieve it to recoup a day's pay, that's their prerogative. But I can tell you if it was my kid, I wouldn't allow them to grieve it. I would say, 'Take this like a man and learn from it.' That's simply what we're trying to do."

...

Even though the Sabres lost Tuesday's game, it was one of the most memorable of Myers' career. The defenseman played his first game in Calgary, the town he grew up and played minor hockey in, after he missed three previous trips due to illness, injury or NHL suspension. Myers had more than a dozen friends and family members at the Saddledome watching.

"It was pretty exciting, six years in the making," Myers said here Wednesday. "It really took a while but it was great to finally play in front of friends and family. It was a good feeling. It was nice to see some old faces from the summer and to spend some time after the game."

Myers said he was relieved to get through the Sabres' Jan. 18 loss at Detroit unscathed knowing the Calgary game was the first one after the All-Star break.

"I figured, 'Now, I just have to get through the break,'" he said. "I was pretty happy to know I was healthy coming in. I think my group was anticipating it even more than me."

...

Nolan said Jhonas Enroth will play goal Thursday, and it's possible Matt Hackett could get his first start of the season Friday in Vancouver.

The Sabres did not make any changes to their forward lines at practice Wednesday. Zadorov skated on the extra defense pairing with Andre Benoit, who was a healthy scratch in Calgary.

Oilers' Hall could miss game against Sabres

By Staff Report

NHL.com

January 28, 2015

SABRES (14-31-3) at OILERS (12-27-9)

TV: MSG-B, BELL TV, SNOL

Season series: The Edmonton Oilers are going for a two-game sweep of the Buffalo Sabres; they rallied to win at Buffalo on Nov. 7 when Boyd Gordon scored the tie-breaking goal with 4:15 remaining. Goaltender Michal Neuvirth kept the Sabres in the game with 49 saves.

Sabres team scope: Buffalo hasn't lost at Rexall Place since Oct. 16, 2003, outscoring the Oilers 20-6 in four victories. But this season's edition of the Sabres comes to Edmonton having lost 12 consecutive games, dropping Buffalo to last place in the overall standings, two points ahead of the Oilers. Coach Ted Nolan said defenseman Nikita Zadorov will be a healthy scratch after he was suspended for Buffalo's 4-1 loss to the Calgary Flames on Tuesday after returning late from his vacation during the All-Star break. Zadorov apologized to his teammates, and coach Ted Nolan said he's more than likely going to play Friday against the Vancouver Canucks. Jhonas Enroth will start in goal.

Oilers team scope: Edmonton didn't have first-line left wing Taylor Hall in the lineup for its 2-1 home loss to the Minnesota Wild on Tuesday due to a bone bruise on his lower right leg sustained at practice Monday. Hall didn't take part in practice Wednesday, and coach Todd Nelson told the Oilers website Hall is day-to-day. Nelson said the Oilers have been "trying to push the tempo and play a faster game," but added that puck movement has to improve for this to happen. The Oilers managed only one goal and 24 shots in the loss to Minnesota. Goaltender Viktor Fasth, who has started the past three games, made the case for another start by making 27 saves.

Sabres GM: NHL trade market 'very, very quiet'

By Mike Johnston

Sportsnet

January 28, 2015

With the March 2 NHL trade deadline fast approaching, Buffalo Sabres general manager Tim Murray says the market might not be as busy as people think.

"It's been quiet, to be frank. It's been very, very quiet. We're fairly close to the deadline and I didn't expect it," Murray told Buffalo radio station WGR 550 Wednesday. "I don't expect every team to be active, but there usually are a small amount of teams that don't wait for the deadline, that like to get it done before the deadline...It has, to me, been surprisingly quiet. People aren't even kicking tires."

The Sabres are currently dead last in the NHL standings and are expected to be sellers at the deadline. A number of Buffalo players' names have been out there in trade rumours this season, including forwards Chris Stewart and Torrey Mitchell, plus defenceman Tyler Myers and pending UFA goalies Michal Neuvirth and Jhonas Enroth.

Murray said nothing is imminent on the trade front and that deals are more difficult to complete than many people think.

"It's easy to talk about trading players in fantasy hockey (but) these guys are men. These guys have families. It's hard on them," Murray explained. "I read every day I'm trading Tyler Myers, I'm trading this guy, that guy...There are a lot of rumours out there that are completely unfounded..."

"I think other teams know exactly where I stand. We have to get better and our better is not today. Our better is in the future, so I think they know that I'm ready to listen and be a trade partner if that makes sense. In saying that, though, the amount of rumours that have been out there are probably about 50 times more than the conversations I've had."

The Sabres are coming off a 4-1 loss to the Calgary Flames Tuesday and visit the Edmonton Oilers Thursday in a battle of basement dwellers.

Sabres lift Nikita Zadorov's suspension

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
January 28, 2015

The Buffalo Sabres lifted defenseman Nikita Zadorov's suspension when he returned to the team Wednesday. Still, the 19-year-old defenseman won't play tonight against the Oilers.

The Sabres suspended Zadorov on Monday after his flight from the Dominican Republic got oversold, leaving him stuck following the NHL All-Star break.

The Russian missed Monday's practice and the team's flight to Calgary. He was scratched for Tuesday's 4-1 loss to the Flames.

"Somebody does that, you just don't say, 'I'm sorry' and put them right back in," Sabres coach Ted Nolan told media outlets Wednesday in Edmonton, including The Buffalo News.

Zadorov practiced Wednesday and will likely play Friday in Vancouver, Nolan said.

The rookie, whose maturity has been an issue all season, apologized to his teammates, Nolan said.

"He may be immature in some things, but (he's) very mature in others," Nolan said. "He had a nice conversation with the team. He spoke to the team. He apologized to the team, and it wasn't your standard, 'I'm sorry.' It was heartfelt.

"Sometimes, like we're all going through this year, it's a learning curve – it's a big learning curve – and rebuilds are something that are not pleasant."

Zadorov added: "It's kind of my fault. I guess I shouldn't do that."

Nolan understands Zadorov's mistake.

"I was just mentioning if I was 19, went somewhere and they told me to come back Sunday, I'd probably come back on Sunday, too," Nolan said. "I just didn't have anyone to inform me at the time, say, 'Hey, maybe you should come back on Saturday just in case the flight gets canceled.'"

Tonight's game features the NHL's two worst teams. The Sabres, who rank 30th, have lost 12 straight games in regulation.

Sabres Zadorov said he deserved suspension

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

January 28, 2015

Edmonton, AB (WGR 550) -- Nikita Zadorov was back at practice in Edmonton, but won't play Thursday against the Oilers. Zadorov was extremely sorry for what happened and took responsibility, "I didn't get onto the plane because they sold more tickets than seats on the plane and there were no other planes to put me on because they were also full, so I got to stay there another day. It's kind of my fault and I feel sorry, I should make the trip a day earlier and have the extra day. It's kind of my mistake and next time I've got to do better." Zadorov added, "I didn't show up on time, so probably they did the right thing."

Ted Nolan had a long talk with his young defenseman, Zadorov said he had advice for him, "He just said next time when you're in the room, ask all the guys when they're coming back and when you should come back because you're a new guy, you're a young guy, so look at older guys and ask them what you have to do."

Nolan said when he was 19, he may have done the same thing. The head coach said, "Through maturity and through experience, it's what Nikita went through. Should he have come back earlier, well if planes are on time and everything's set, then nobody knows."

It wasn't just a talk with Nolan. Zadorov went into the locker-room before practice and addressed the players. Nolan said, "He had a nice conversation with the team, he spoke to the team, he apologized to the team and it was heartfelt and it's a learning curve."

Zadorov missed the Calgary game and he will also miss the Edmonton game despite the suspension being lifted. Nolan said, "When somebody does that you don't just say sorry and put him right back in." Nolan added he more than likely will play in Vancouver.

Jhonas Enroth will get the start in Edmonton.

Would fewer games make for a better product?

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

January 28, 2015

Edmonton, AB (WGR 550) -- As I was watching the Sabres play the Flames I really enjoyed the game. It was nice to watch pure hockey, the players were fast, there was jump from the break and there were plenty of scoring chances. This happens every season after the All Star break and Brian Gionta could feel it, "I thought the pace was pretty high. I thought both teams were moving, I thought it had great pace to it, for sure."

Ted Nolan played in the NHL and has of course coached in it. He believes if you reduced the schedule, you'd see much better hockey, "There's no question, but the mighty dollar makes the world go round, but if you give any athlete enough time to really, fully recuperate, I mean there are guys throughout the whole league playing injured most of the year sometimes, if not all the year. If you have a chance to play college hockey or junior hockey and just go on weekends, it's very entertaining." Nolan added, "We've got a wonderful game and sometimes you're a little fatigued playing it, but that's just the way it is right now."

Brian Gionta has been in this league 14 years. He doesn't think fewer games means better play, "It depends what you define as product, guys are rested, guys are fresher then less mistakes happen, less breakdowns, so it doesn't necessarily mean better scoring chances or anything like that. The pace may be a bit quicker at times, but it doesn't lead to a more exciting game all the way around."

There's big money involved and the NHL owners would never approve a 72 games schedule. Torrey Mitchell is one that would be all for it, "It's a very good question and that's been a debate for years now. I'd like to see 10 less games, but at this stage, I mean a lot of us have been playing for a while, our bodies are used to the season, so it doesn't weight on you that much, but yes, I'd like to see 10 less games."

Matt Moulson really doesn't want to see any changes. He said he had no clue if we'd see better hockey, but he also said the grind is part of the test to win a championship, "I think when you see guys winning the Stanley Cup and the satisfaction they feel in battling those 82 games and battling throughout the playoffs, it's a grind and a tough thing to win. It's probably one of the hardest trophies to win in any pro sports, so to me the long season and the battling throughout the season and the playoffs is something that I think is enjoyable to be part of and to watch as well."

I got some very interesting answers throughout the room and many like some of these I wasn't expecting. There are some good points here and things to think about.

Zadorov to sit against Edmonton

By Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

January 28, 2015

EDMONTON – Nikita Zadorov was back at practice Wednesday afternoon at Rexall Place but he will face further consequences for not reporting to practice on time Monday following the All-Star Break.

He met the team in Calgary on Tuesday but did not play against the Flames. Sabres coach Ted Nolan said Wednesday after practice that Zadorov will also not play Thursday night against the Edmonton Oilers.

The 19-year-old Russian defenseman was on vacation during the break and had a flight scheduled back to Buffalo on Sunday. However, his flight was overbooked so he had to stay overnight, resulting in him missing Monday's practice and being suspended by the team.

"I know it's kind of my fault because I shouldn't do that. I should make the trip a day early and then you have a safe day, an extra day," a contrite Zadorov said. "It's kind of my mistake because I just shouldn't do that. Next time I'm going to be safer and I'm going to do better."

Sabres coach Ted Nolan sat down to talk with Zadorov sometime after Wednesday's game.

"I just mentioned to him if I was 19 and I went somewhere, they told me to come back on Sunday, I'd probably come back on Sunday, too," Nolan said. "I just didn't have anyone to inform me at the time and say, 'Hey, maybe you should come back on Saturday just in case flights get canceled.' But that's through maturity and experience.

"That's what Nikita went through. Should he have come back earlier? [If] planes are on time, everything's set, nobody knows. This is a good lesson he learned early. We had a good talk about that."

Zadorov apologized to the team and Nolan feels like this could turn into a positive for both Zadorov, the younger players on the club and the team as a whole as they continue to work to rebuild and bond together.

"For a young man who may be immature on some things but very mature on others, he had a nice conversation with the team," Nolan said. "He spoke to the team. He apologized to the team. It wasn't your standard, 'Boys, I'm sorry.' It was heartfelt."

Zadorov suspected that he would not dress for the game on Thursday and Nolan confirmed those suspicions after practice. Wednesday also marked the first time Zadorov had skated with the team since Jan. 18, which factored into the decision.

"I'm learning every day, but all the same, it's my mistake because I didn't book the flight a day earlier. I feel sorry right now," Zadorov said. "But still, it is what it is. It happened, we've got to move forward. I'm here. I'm ready to go and help my team do the best."

CHEMISTRY ON THE MAN ADVANTAGE

Buffalo's power play will enter Thursday's game with goals in each of their past three contests. The first unit consisting of Tyler Ennis, Zemgus Girgensons, Chris Stewart, Tyler Myers and Rasmus Ristolainen has produced all three goals.

"We've found chemistry in two units now and we're keeping it simple. We're trying to move pucks quick and get pucks to the net as quick as we can. Stewie's doing a really job in front," Ennis said.

On Buffalo's goal against Calgary, Girgensons won the first faceoff of the man advantage and the Sabres worked the puck over to Ennis at the right point. Ennis fired a shot on net and Stewart tipped it in 13 seconds in. The goal was pretty similar to a power-play marker that Stewart tipped in against Detroit in their last game before the break.

"Z's been doing a really great job on draws and then we kind of spread it and make things happen quickly," Ennis said. "The last few games, we've been getting quick goals on the power play."

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Nolan said that Enroth will start against the Oilers.

The Tops Gamenight pregame show will begin at 9 p.m. EST on Thursday on MSG-B and Bell TV with faceoff scheduled for 9:30 p.m. EST. The game can also be heard live on WGR 550.

College Hockey Report

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

January 28, 2015

CANISIUS COLLEGE GOLDEN GRIFFINS (12-8-6 overall; 11-4-5 Atlantic Hockey)

Ralph Cuddemi and Ryan Schmelzer combined for nine points in Canisius' two-game sweep over archrival Niagara, a series that featured two very different games that ended with the same result. On Thursday, Canisius pulled away from a third period tie with three goals in the last frame and won 4-1. On Saturday, they staved off a three-goal third period from Niagara to win 6-4.

"There's a lot of different ways to lose a game, and with our seniors leading the way, we found a couple different ways to win games this weekend," Canisius coach Dave Smith said Monday. "It's a nice thing, to be able to find different ways to win when you don't have certain things going your way and I think that's a sign of experience and maturity."

Cuddemi scored two for Canisius on Thursday and was the only Griff on the board when they went into the third period tied at one. He scored again less than two minutes into that frame to swing momentum in the Griffs' favor. Jeff Murray and Mitch McCrank sealed the victory with a pair of insurance goals later on.

Cuddemi scored first again on Saturday and helped build a lead for the Griffs with assists on their next two goals, both in the second period from Chris Rumble and McCrank. Schmelzer scored later in that frame and the Griffs rode into the third period with a 4-1 lead. But Niagara had life. The Purple Eagles scored two unanswered to climb within one. Schmelzer scored again late to add to the Griffs' lead and Niagara answered yet again, scoring with 38 seconds to play. That was as close as Niagara would come, however, with Cuddemi scoring an empty-netter to seal the deal seconds later.

Linemates Cuddemi and Shane Conacher both tallied a career-high four points in Saturday's contest. For his efforts, Cuddemi was named Atlantic Hockey Player of the Week and the NCAA's Third Star of the Week. The junior now leads Canisius with 29 points and 16 goals this season, the culmination of progress that Smith has seen since Cuddemi went scoreless in the first half of his freshman season.

"He just continues to be hungry," Smith said. "You give him a little bit, he wants more. You give him a little more, he wants more. And that is fun to be around. And he does continue to get better all the time."

Schmelzer, the third member of the Griffs' top line alongside Cuddemi and Conacher, was also honored as he was named Atlantic Hockey's Co-Rookie of the Week. Niagara freshman Robert Angiolella also received the honor.

"I think it's great," Smith said. "Battle of Western New York, a Western New York kid is plus-five and scores the big game-winner and really steps up to the plate. That's stuff that he can talk about for a lifetime. That's a recruiting story, a story that we're going to tell other kids."

Upcoming Games

- Friday, February 6 @ Robert Morris (7:05 p.m.)
- Saturday, February 7 @ Robert Morris (7:05 p.m.)

NIAGARA UNIVERSITY PURPLE EAGLES (3-19-2 overall; 3-13-2 Atlantic Hockey)

For as close as Niagara came to beating Canisius in both of their contests at Dwyer Arena, their song remained very much the same -- the Purple Eagles' winless streak extended to 12 games since sweeping Army in early November. Knowing that they outplayed the No. 2 team in Atlantic Hockey at various points in both games, however, gave them reason to believe that they're headed in the right direction.

Head coach Dave Burkholder was quick to point out following Thursday's loss, for example, that at one point in the first period Niagara was outshooting Canisius 14-1. They outshot the Griffs 28-24 in the totality of Saturday's comeback effort, in which they received goals from TJ Sarcona, Kevin Patterson, and two from Angiolella.

"With the season that we had, the only thing we can hope for is that we get another shot at them in the playoffs," Burkholder said on Tuesday.

Perhaps the most promising aspect of Niagara's weekend was the performance of Angiolella, who came into the weekend having not played in eight games due to injury. He scored Niagara's first and last goals on Saturday, and added a third point with an assist on Patterson's goal in the third period.

"I was as surprised as anyone," Burkholder said. "To come back and have the type of game that he did; he's a player that we need. He's an impact player for us and I think he'll stay hot."

Niagara will next face a team that has suffered similar fortunes, with a pair of games against a Holy Cross team that is winless in its last six games. The Purple Eagles dropped a pair to the Crusaders in early December, but Burkholder has reason to believe their re-match might be coming at the right time: Matt Ginn, Holy Cross' starting goaltender and one of the best in Atlantic Hockey, may have to miss the games due to injury.

"We have 10 games left," Burkholder said. "We have a third of our season left to turn this thing around."

Upcoming Games

- January 30 @ Holy Cross (7 p.m.)
- January 31 @ Holy Cross (7 p.m.)

RIT TIGERS (9-11-4 overall, 8-6-4 Atlantic Hockey)

RIT had its four-game unbeaten streak snapped in a 2-1 loss at Bentley on Friday. They responded by getting back on track right away, beating Bentley 5-2 the following day in a game that featured a pair of goals each from senior Matt Garbowsky and junior Josh Mitchell.

The Tigers outshot Bentley 33-17 in the loss on Friday night. But despite their shot advantage, they found themselves in a 2-0 hole entering the third period. RIT poured on 15 shots in that final frame in an effort to come back, but only one found the back of the net – a rebound attempt from Andrew Miller five minutes into the period.

"The good thing again – and I said this after our Minnesota loss – we were truly disappointed. Not happy we hung in there, but disappointed we lost," Tigers coach Wayne Wilson said regarding Friday's loss. "We just felt we were the better team Friday night. We didn't win."

RIT did a good job channeling that frustration into something positive the next night. Trailing 1-0 after the first period, Garbowsky and Miller each scored a goal to take back momentum in the second. Bentley tied it again at two early in the third period, but the Tigers responded with three unanswered to run away with the victory.

For as good as his top-line offensive players faired on Saturday, Wilson credited his defense with making the difference in the series – particularly on the penalty kill. The Tigers killed off all six of Bentley's power plays on Saturday and all four on Friday; that fact is made even more impressive when taking into account that the Falcons lead Atlantic Hockey in power-play conversion.

Their next opponent – Army – hasn't had near the offensive success that Bentley has. If the Tigers play like they did Saturday, finishing offensively and strong on the penalty kill, their loss Friday could turn out to be a mere blip on the radar.

Upcoming Games

- January 30 vs. Army (7:05 p.m., Gene Polisseni Center)
 - January 31 vs. Army (7:05 p.m., Gene Polisseni Center)
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BUFFALO STATE BENGALS (7-10-2 overall; 3-5-2 SUNYAC)

The Bengals returned to SUNYAC play with a lopsided loss to nationally-ranked Oswego on Friday night, falling 6-0 against the same team they had taken to overtime in their season opener. They responded with a victory the next night, however, beating Cortland 7-3 on the road.

Buffalo State's contest with Oswego was over shortly after it began. The Lakers took complete control in the first period, scoring three times to take a commanding lead. Oswego scored on the power play in the second period and twice more late in the third for good measure. The Bengals, meanwhile, couldn't take advantage of their own opportunities, going 0-4 on the power play. In his first game since Nov. 14, Bengals goaltender Mike DeLaVergne stopped 39 of 45 shots.

Things looked bleak yet again the following night at Cortland. The Bengals allowed a power play goal in the first period and found themselves trailing 1-0 heading into the first intermission.

"We had a lot of chances in the first period," Bengals coach Nick Carriere said. "I thought we had some really good looks, we outshot them by a significant number, and the one chance that they had they scored on. So you come back into the room after the first period and you're kind of shaking your head saying 'jeez, this is going to be another one of those games.'"

But it wasn't another one of those games. The Bengals quickly re-established their confidence in the second period, scoring twice in the first three minutes. Cortland responded with a goal, but Buffalo State padded their lead with three unanswered thereafter. Captain Brett Hope recorded his first career hat-trick with three goals in the win.

The Bengals will have a week off before returning home to play Plattsburgh on Feb. 6.

Upcoming Games

- February 6 vs. Plattsburgh (7 p.m., Buffalo State Ice Arena)
- February 7 vs. Plattsburgh (7 p.m., Buffalo State Ice Arena)